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Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF) Awards 17 grants to Rural-Serving Nonprofits

(September 14, 2007 – Annapolis) The Maryland Agricultural Education and Rural Development Assistance Fund (MAERDAF), which is administered by the Rural Maryland Council, will award more than \$250,000 in grants to 17 rural-serving nonprofit organizations during 2007-08.

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) received nearly \$800,000 in requests for the \$250,000 available in grant funds.

“There is no shortage of ideas and innovations and commitment in our rural areas,” said RMC Executive Director David M. Jenkins. “Choosing which projects and programs to fund when all are doing important work is a very, very difficult job, and we appreciate the participation of interagency review board members.”

Established in 2000, MAERDAF provides grants to rural-serving nonprofit organizations that undertake statewide and regional planning, economic and community development, and agricultural and forestry education projects. MAERDAF also provides grants to community colleges that support small and agricultural businesses through enhanced training and technical assistance. All funded projects must serve at least two rural counties. The grantees are:

Statewide Rural-Serving Nonprofits

- **Future Harvest - Chesapeake Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture** (Grant: \$2,330) - To assist with the statewide Farming for Profit and Stewardship Conference.
- **Lead Maryland** (Grant: \$25,000) - To help expand staff capacity and meet the goals of its strategic plan.
- **Maryland Association of Soil Conservation Districts** (Grant: \$9,800) - To help conduct the Maryland Envirothon, a statewide high school environmental education competition.
- **Maryland FFA Foundation** (Grant: \$8,000) - To assist with the annual state convention and career development event for high school students.
- **Maryland Forests Association** (Grant: \$5,000) - To assist with the annual meeting which draws approximately 200 attendees from around the state.
- **Microenterprise Council of Maryland** (Grant: \$12,000) - To create a web portal of rural entrepreneur service providers across the state.

Eastern Shore:

- **Delmarva Education Foundation**, serving Wicomico and Somerset counties. (Grant: \$12,869) - To assist with the College/ Career Access Program.
- **Friend of the Grape, Inc.**, serving the Mid Shore Region. (Grant: \$15,000) - To help the Chesapeake Culinary Center professionally train a workforce for the hospitality industry

- **Habitat for Humanity of Talbot County**, serving Talbot and Dorchester counties. (Grant: \$15,000) - To help eliminate substandard housing for families whose income falls between 40-50 percent of the median
- **Lower Shore Broadband Cooperative**, serving the lower shore. (Grant: \$20,000) - To assist with the construction of two wireless sites on the lower shore
- **Mac, Inc.**, serving Dorchester, Somerset, Wicomico and Worcester counties. (Grant: \$13,105) - To help deliver the Managing Chronic Pain for Arthritis program.
- **Maryland Capital Enterprises**, serving the Mid-Shore region. (Grant: \$21,625) - To help cultivate additional partnerships and solidify existing ones
- **Mid-Shore Regional Council**, serving Talbot, Dorchester and Caroline counties. (Grant: \$14,000) - To help establish and maintain an agricultural economic development specialist
- **Maryland Rural Development Corporation**, serving the Upper Shore. (Grant: \$19,010) - To assist with the Emergency Preparedness Taskforce Initiative
- **Upper Shore Regional Council**, serving Kent, Cecil and Queen Anne's counties. (Grant: \$5,000) - To help develop alternative markets for grains grown on the Eastern Shore

Western Maryland

- **Mountain Laurel Medical Center**, serving Western Maryland. (Grant: \$44,000) - To help with start-up costs for this new federally qualified health center which serves low income and uninsured residents in these medically underserved areas.
- **Tri-County Council of Western Maryland**, serving Garrett, Washington and Allegany counties. (Grant: \$10,000) - To help the Business Technical Assistance Program promotes small business and entrepreneurial growth in western Maryland

The MAERDAF program was born out of the frustration experienced by a number of rural-serving nonprofit organizations and community colleges that had difficulty obtaining adequate, much needed programmatic or special projects funding. Unlike their counterparts operating near or in the urban and suburban areas, rural nonprofits typically lack access to public and private philanthropic opportunities. Moreover, given the economic distress found in the rural regions of the State, many local governments do not have the financial wherewithal to address these important developmental needs. Consequently, a serious resource deficit existed where, in many instances, the need had been the greatest.

The MAERDAF Review Board is made up of representatives from the Maryland Departments of Agriculture, Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Maryland Departments of Business and Economic Development, Maryland Departments of Housing and Community Development, and Maryland Departments of Natural Resources as well as the Rural Maryland Council which administers the program.

For an Annual Report on the MAERDAF program, visit the publications page of the Rural Maryland Council Website at: www.rural.state.md.us/Publications.

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The Rural Maryland Council is an independent state agency that brings together community-based organizations, federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify and seek solutions to the unique needs of Rural Maryland communities. As a collaborative partnership, the RMC operates in a nonpartisan and nondiscriminatory manner.